

Gender Stereotypes in Higher Education: A Profile of Kerala

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Abstract: Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the developmental process. Higher education is recognized as a powerful instrument of socio economic advancement of the society in general and a vehicle for upward social mobility for deprived and marginalized sections in particular. Now, India has the second largest higher education system of the world, but it is accessible only to 12% of the youth in the age-group 18-24 years. The deprived sections of the society, especially women, have had limited access to higher education. Woman is still confined within the four walls of the home because their duties as good daughter, good wife and good mother, well defined by the Indian Patriarchal society. It is a sad commentary on women hood, the inability of women to realize her individual potential, trapped in a non reactive, terrified, male-centric life, which invites every type of atrocities against her. This denies woman safety, life security and educational opportunity from cradle to grave. These so called traditional convictions and stereotypes act as a strong barrier that prevent access to the women folks to the world of emancipation through the wings of higher education. When women and men have relative equality, economies grow faster, children's health improves and everybody can realize their individual potential, to contribute to their state and country's economic and social development. Hence the paper focuses on the traditional stereotypes which hinder their participation in higher education and the current profile of women in the higher education system of Kerala.

Keywords: Gender, Stereotypes, women education, Indian higher education, Kerala higher education, juggernauts.

INTRODUCTION

Kerala occupies an enviable position in terms of several indicators of social and human development. When several indicators of human development are concerned Kerala ranks fairly well in comparison with some of the advanced countries of the world. Recent recommendation made by Reguram Committee that Kerala is the second developed state in India in terms of human development index is concerned [1]. It stands as the most literate state and as a state that provides elementary education to all the eligible children. Kerala's education performance has been so impressive that it could receive the distinctive acclamation as the 'Kerala model'; and some recommend *Keralization* of the whole education system in India [2].

The higher education system of Kerala is developing with the tactful efforts of government by allowing various government and aided colleges in each taluks of Kerala. But the education of girls concerned many important lessons can be drawn from the valuable educational experience of Kerala, a few uncomfortable lessons also flow from the same Kerala experience. On the one side girls are sharpening their intellects through

higher education on the other a major part of girls remain unaffected due to the traditional stereotypes which obstruct their participation in higher education. Hence this paper explores the advancement the state had achieved by revealing the current profile of women in the higher education system of Kerala. It also enlists traditional stereotypes which hinder women participation in higher education.

HIGHER EDUCATION INDIAN SCENARIO

Higher education institutions are renowned as vital social institutions. They are performing prominent social functions, that are extensively acknowledged as noble and the hub for the sustenance of societies, besides generating and disseminating knowledge [3]. Being at the peak of the educational pyramid, higher education has to become more dynamic as never before, constantly entering uncharted domains. The Indian higher education system has grown remarkably, mainly in the Post Independence period, to become one of the largest systems of the world. Considerable achievements have been made in increasing access, guaranteeing equity and improving quality of higher education. As per the first provisional report of All

India Survey on Higher Education, the Gross Enrolment Ratio in 2010-11 (estimated) was 18.8. In the higher education sector a new Centrally Sponsored Scheme named Rashtriya Ucchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) has been envisioned during the 12th Plan, for incentivisation of State Governments for improving higher education. The key intentions of RUSA are to improve access, equity and quality in higher education through the planned development of higher education system at the State level, by generating academic institutions that are self reliant in terms of quality management, have a greater leaning towards research and provides students with education that is relevant to them as well as the Nation as a whole [4]. Hence all the educationally backward state can increase accessibility

and quality in higher education by availing the new centrally sponsored scheme.

Women comprise 48% of the total population of India. They not only constitute valuable human resource of the country but their development in the socio-economic dome sets pace for sustainable growth of the economy. Various equity schemes are being implemented by the Government to promote higher education with special focus on the students belonging to underprivileged and deprived sections of the society. The UGC has also commenced several schemes for the benefit of girls and women in the area of Gender and Social Equity [5]. Table 1 shows the state wise students enrolment in universities and colleges in the year 2010-11.

Table 1: State-wise students' enrolment in Universities & Colleges: 2010-11

Sl.No	State/UT	Total Enrolment	Women Enrolment	% of women
1	Andhra Pradesh	1847479	718894	38.9
2	Arunachal Pradesh	16068	5355	33.3
3	Assam	268451	127514	47.5
4	Bihar	690776	215748	31.2
5	Chattisgarh	304381	111403	36.6
6	Delhi	278770	129628	46.5
7	Goa	26783	16381	61.2
8	Gujarat	893648	358353	40.1
9	Haryana	452565	201844	44.6
10	Himachal Pradesh	133564	66114	49.5
11	Jammu & Kashmir	184394	84615	45.9
12	Jharkhand	274450	91825	33.5
13	Karnataka	1001473	429919	42.9
14	Kerala	404121	229494	56.8
15	Madhya Pradesh	928939	353817	38.1
16	Maharashtra	1955226	858313	43.9

17	Manipur	33755	14999	44.4
18	Meghalaya	41633	21552	51.8
19	Mizoram	12303	5895	47.9
20	Nagaland	20026	10121	50.5
21	Orissa	510418	209454	41.0
22	Punjab	469870	234176	49.8
23	Rajasthan	789479	298750	37.8
24	Sikkim	11608	5731	49.4
25	Tamil Nadu	1482277	700154	47.2
26	Tripura	32800	14431	44.0
27	Uttar Pradesh	2564886	982806	38.3
28	Uttarakhand	294485	121563	41.3
29	West Bengal	944075	377059	39.9
30	A & N Island	3158	1642	52.0
31	Chandigarh	64510	32666	50.6
32	D & N Haveli	2120	996	47.0
33	Daman & Diu	860	404	47.0
34	Lakshdweep	410	143	34.9
35	Puducherry	35122	16929	48.2
	Grand Total	16974883	7048688	41.5

Source: UGC Annual Report 2010-11

From the table women enrolment as a percentage of total enrolment in a State is the highest in Goa (61.2%) followed by Kerala (56.8%) and the lowest in Bihar (31.2%). Share of the women enrolment in higher education in Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Maharashtra and Karnataka is higher than the national average. NER/Hilly States and Union Territories, except Arunachal Pradesh & Lakshadweep, also have women enrolment above the national average. Whereas, women enrolments in the states like Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar

Pradesh, Orissa, Gujarat and West Bengal is below national average.

With all these efforts enrolment of Women in higher education which was less than 10% of the total enrolment on the eve of Independence has risen to 41.5% in the academic year 2010-11[6]. Out of 169.75 lakh students enrolled in higher education in 2010-11, almost 70.49 lakhs were women as compared to just about 47.08 lakh women enrolled in 2006-07, reveals the University Grants Commission (UGC) report.

THE PROFILE OF KERALA HIGHER EDUCATION

The education system of Kerala is far advancing as far as other states are concerned. But the state of Kerala concentrated rather exclusively on primary and secondary levels of education with the objective to accomplish universalisation of elementary education thereby ignoring higher education to a greater extent. Even though Due to the continuous efforts of government Kerala's higher education system is at present is subjected to a quantitative expansion with the strong interference from the part of government realising the fact that the state needs more number of higher education institutions to improve the GER. The urgency of providing higher education to the needy person accentuated sanctioning of new government and aided colleges in the each taluks of Kerala. Kerala has now 12 universities; two deemed universities and one central university. There are 962 Colleges affiliated to different universities of Kerala. The number of women students enrolling for higher education in India has shot up, and Kerala stands second in terms of enrolment.

As the other states of India is concerned Kerala with its rich culture of respecting womanhood had

given due value to her rights and needs boosting her self esteem. In spite of its varied traditions, all have offered more scope and place for women than they experienced elsewhere in India. Kerala leads India in women's education. Literacy rate in Kerala has marked an upward trend and is 94.00 percent as per 2011 population census. Of that, male literacy stands at 96.11 percent while female literacy is at 100.76 percent. In 2001, literacy rate in Kerala stood at 90.86 percent of which male and female were 94.24 percent and 87.72 percent literate respectively [7]. Women in Kerala occupy high positions in every field of public activity. The Malayalee woman has an intense social sense, civic and national consciousness. She uses her freedom judiciously and in the spirit of being an equal partner with man. Her role as wife and mother are performed well. Education has only sharpened her intellect, widened her outlook and tuned her social and civic senses.

The GER of Kerala as evidenced from table 2 in higher education is 12% whereas for girls it is 14.2% in the year 2009-10. In the rest of the states, GER of Bihar records the lowest at 14.1% for males and 7.5% for females. Goa marks higher in GER 26.1% for males and 30.9% for females' respectively [8].

Table 2: Gross Enrolment Ratio in Higher Education (18-23 Years)

Sl.No.	States	Male	Female	Total
1	Goa	26.1	30.9	28.3
2	Kerala	12.0	14.2	13.1
3	Bihar	14.1	7.5	11.0

Source: MHRD survey on higher education 2009-10 (provisional)

The enrolment of PhD/Mphil courses in the year 2009-10 excluding open universities has shown that Goa ranks 58.33% for girls as compared to 41.66% boys enrolled to PhD and Mphil courses. In the same state girls enrolled 77.34% for arts courses and 72.25% for commerce PG courses respectively. It indicates that girls are enrolled higher in arts and commerce PG courses while boys have an under representation in the states of Goa. The states of Kerala in the enrollment of PhD has shown near similar trends enrollment of 52.33% of girls enrolled to PhD and Mphil courses whereas for arts and commerce PG courses it is 72.96% and 65.87% respectively. But the states of Bihar ranks very low in girls enrollment to PhD and MPhil courses indicating 27.72% and 29.61 and 19.52 for commerce PG courses. It is too meager as compared to the other states of India.

Kerala, a state known for its high human development and near universal literacy, tops the Indian states in educational attainment of women in the

primary and secondary levels. Compared to other states Kerala women enjoy the fruits of higher education. However, the educational performance of the state assumes a very different stature, quite a deplorable one, when one looks at its dispersion and outliers instead of the averages. Though governmental policies and efforts from the government and NGOs have helped in addressing to a great extent, if not completely eliminating, the inter-generational differences in attaining higher education sectors in the state is painted with dull colors. Upon examining the socio-demographic fabric it can be understood that disparities is mainly due to the traditional gender stereotypes act as a juggernaut to the participation of women in the higher education of Kerala.

Stereotypes as a juggernaut to higher education

Gender stereotype is one type of "subjective perception of what a man or woman should be or how people should behave [9]. Most of these stereotypes often described men as intellectually, competent, strong

and brave, while women areas homely, warm and expressiveness, incompetent and passive. They portray the male as the strong, dominant person with leadership trait, one who works should outside the home in often-prestigious occupations, while female is usually portrayed as being subordinate and confined to the home [10] (Fiske, 1993; Stangor & Lange, 1994).

Historically women are excluded from the respected ranks of the academy, the so called convention which restricted the contribution of women by perpetuating stereotypes like women are biologically inferior, deficient in natural intellectual ability, women are treated as second sex, her temperament is presumed like unstable, they lack motivation and women's domestic preoccupations preclude public life. Women face challenges of multiple roles that may limit their ability to access the traditional mediums of higher education. Due to their multiple existing roles women are particularly 'vulnerable to negative effects of adding a new role such as student to their already busy lives. Throughout history, women have vigorously challenged the concept of preordained female subservience. Not until the twentieth century, however, women have been able to organize world-wide initiatives toward rectifying the imbalances. The following are the major traditional stereotypes which act as a juggernaut to the participation of women in higher education.

Gender socialization within family

Family is the informal and most important agency of education. It is from the family the child learn the very basis of education. Being the first agent of socialization Mother unconsciously perpetuates gendering practices and introduces the girl child in to the world of male dominance. Hence family try to maintain the existing culture of the society by reinforcing the stratification system already ingrained in our culture and society.

The typical patriarchal families in our society build on the nurturing and docile aspects of womanliness. Hence majority of the family consider it as illogical and pointless that withdrawing a girl from the family and sending her to school. The gender based division of labour at home, allots a number of tasks to girls. It is seen to be a girl's inherent nature to tend and care for others and not waste time on self-oriented activities such as going to school or playing with friends.

Child marriage

The practice of child marriage was legally banned in our country. But National family health survey (NFHS, 2005-06) reported that 44% of women

in India married before the legal age of 18 years, in rural areas the proportion is 52% [11]. The practice of child marriage prevents girls' education which is an essential process to equip women personal development and her effective participation in the future endeavors of society. Parents in Kerala are marrying off their daughter often not more than 11 years or 12 years old to much older groom.

Social Custom

The time span between the onset of puberty and betrothal is regarded as one of potential danger for a girl, because it is the first time she experience seclusion or purdah as well as restraints on activities within the home during menstruation. The link between family's prestige *and* control of women's sexuality results in not only limits on physical activities but also taboos associated with purity and pollution such as regarding women as unclean at specific times. At the same time, girls have to be kept chaste and pure so as to be acceptable in the marriage market. All these affect girls' enrolment in higher education.

Multiple Roles-Mother, Wife, Employee and Student

Most of the women experience their multiple roles were a big challenge to the advancement in learning. This challenge was linked to the wife's traditional role of caring for the home and the family. It becomes difficult for women to concentrate on one's studies ignoring the family. Difficulties were encountered in attending tutorials, consulting tutors and attending discussion groups.

Poverty

Most poor families do not consider worthwhile to educate their girls who can work at home or for a wage. The increasing child labour figure shows that poor families heavily depend on their children. In such a situation the return on education, which normally means a few years of higher learning, are low. In addition to that the high cost of education is viewed as a poor investment and which does not offer a sure access to better employment.

Non-Supportive Spouses

Lack of understanding on the part of their spouses may adversely affect women's participation in distance learning. Spouses deny the opportunity to attend group discussions, and to seek advice and guidance from male tutors.

Time Constraint

This barrier is linked to the multiple roles of women. After performing all other duties tied to their other roles, women seem to be pressed for time when it

came to their university studies. As a result, some ended up missing assignment submission deadlines; failing to submit assignments, submitting sub-standard assignments, failing to attend tutorials and group discussions.

Financial Challenges

Women tended to be the last in the families' financial packing order. Priority one was paying fees for the children. For married couples, the husbands give priority to his own higher studies thereby enhancing his professional excellence and ignoring his wife due to the traditional stigmatized roles such as good wives, good mother and should remain in the four walls of the home. This assumption is typically perpetuates the institution of patriarchy. Hence women are more adversely participate in the higher education.

However, it is interesting to note that more and more women are not satisfied with their current levels of educational attainment and have aspirations to further their qualifications. In many countries, a trend is being noticed of women returning to higher education to enhance their qualifications to be able to enter job market after they have 'completed' their 'reproductive role'. Economic necessity of having to supplement the family income is also becoming a reality. These are the social stereotypes which destruct the destiny of women to be learned and participate in the wider public sphere. The state which stands erect in terms of increasing participation of girls in higher education is Kerala which is comparatively shows a mark of empowerment. However Kerala too experience some form of gender stereotypes.

The higher education system of Kerala is advancing in terms of gender gaps, but it is not an indication that the whole women in Kerala enjoying the fruits of higher education. Like other states Kerala too has its own juggernauts which obstruct their participation in higher learning. Though the representation of women in terms of enrollment is quiet satisfactory compared to other states a thorough reorientation is to be bring about on the real accomplishment to be achieved by these access. Hence some suggestions are incorporated to ensure women's hundred percentage participation in higher education thereby empowering them to better equips with the changing professional fields and contributes to the nation's progress. Then only the real emancipation of women will be possible by higher education as an instrument of social change.

- The courses for women in higher Learning should be application oriented so that it will

help them in their economic and social empowerment.

- Increase the number of women's studies courses available to ensure that feminist perspectives to be incorporated into curriculum in other disciplines.
- The fee should be affordable to weaker sections of the society especially women.
- Gender sensitization programmes should be organized to sensitize the teachers and learners to increase their participation in higher education.
- Women should be motivated and trained to use technology for faster and easier learning.

CONCLUSION

When we trace the history of Kerala, we could see a transformation of women into the forefront of the society as gradual but a cautious one. Yet, she is not free from the traditional stereotyped roles. Still, she seems pleasing and gratifying the needs of the family and maintains an inimitable status of her own apart from the counterparts and women of other states. We pride ourselves on being the state with the highest literacy rate, low rate of female infanticide, highest female sex ratio, among women. Even though we are developed in all cases, still our higher education sector is not a saturated figure we need increasing participation of women at the same time we have to prevent the hidden traditional stereotypes which restrict the freedom and upholding a restricted code specifically for women which marginalises her effective participation in higher learning thereby by retards our countries prosperous economic and social development.

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